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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 000945

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [MOPS](#) [KWBG](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: CORRECTED: IDF FOILS HAMAS, MOST AMBITIOUS ATTACK
SINCE 2005

REF: TEL AVIV 915

Classified By: Ambassador Richard H. Jones, reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

NOTE: Please see paragraph 5 for corrected text. END NOTE.

¶1. (C) Summary: Early in the morning on April 19, Hamas attempted a simultaneous attack on two crossing points, Kerem Shalom and Kissufim, utilizing armored personnel carriers (APC) and other vehicles loaded with explosives. The Israel Defense Force (IDF) reacted quickly, killing 3 Hamas fighters, with 13 soldiers wounded but no Israelis killed. The MoD has closed all Gaza crossings since the attack, and the IDF has conducted several operations in Gaza. However, a large-scale ground operation remains unlikely, at least until after the 60th Anniversary celebrations and the President's visit in May. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Early on Saturday morning, the eve of the Passover holiday, Hamas fighters approached the Kerem Shalom crossing in an APC and two jeeps disguised as IDF vehicles. Kerem Shalom is the main crossing for humanitarian goods entering Gaza. Despite the fog in the area, a Bedouin IDF commander identified the vehicles as a threat and his men were able to take cover just before the APC, loaded with explosives, was detonated. Hamas fighters from the second vehicle then began an attack and the third vehicle was either detonated or exploded when hit by fire. The IDF repelled the attack and killed three of the Hamas fighters.

¶3. (U) At nearly the same time, another APC car bomb approached the Kissufim crossing, but an IDF tank destroyed the vehicle before it reached the crossing and there were no injuries on the Israeli side. This was the fifth attack on Gaza crossings in the last week and follows the deadly attack on the Nahal Oz crossing, the point of entry for almost all of Gaza's fuel supplies, on April 9. IDF Southern Command Chief Yoav Gallant called the coordinated raid "the worst attack we have seen since disengagement" in 2005 and said he believes Hamas was trying to both create mass casualties and kidnap soldiers to use as bargaining chips.

¶4. (C) IDF had already closed the crossings for the weekend, standard procedure for a holiday, and had increased its alertness following the Nahal Oz attack. Many Israelis believe Hamas is targeting the crossings to provoke increased economic sanctions and IDF reactions, which Hamas then uses to inflame opinion against Israel.

¶5. (C) The Jerusalem Post identified the vehicles as ones given to the Palestinians by Israel during the Oslo process, although their origin has not been confirmed. Members of the international community have donated APC's to the Palestinian Authority (PA) in Gaza at various times since the Oslo process began in the 1990's. The USG requested permission from Israel to deliver APC's to the PA in Gaza in 2005, but permission was not granted and the USG has never given APC's

to the PA.

¶6. (C) Since Saturday, the IDF has carried out several targeted IDF operations into Gaza, killing 7 Palestinians. Lt. Oren Kesler, Deputy Head of the Foreign Relations Department for the Coordinator for Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT), told EconOff that all Gaza crossings have been closed for security reasons, but noted some pedestrians had been allowed through the Erez crossing nonetheless. He said that no decision had been made yet regarding when the crossings might reopen.

¶7. (U) Hamas' attack came a day after former President Carter met Hamas leader Khaled Meshal in Damascus and announced a new plan for a ceasefire in the Gaza strip. Based on media reports, Carter's plan appears to be essentially an endorsement of the strategy developed by the Egyptian mediators. It calls for a mutual ceasefire, the reopening of the border crossings, and a large-scale release of Palestinian prisoners in exchange for Israeli hostage Gilad Shalit. Neither the GOI nor Hamas have responded so far.

¶8. (C) Comment: Kerem Shalom is the principal crossing for humanitarian goods and Nahal Oz is the principal crossing for fuel. Many in Israel think that Hamas' actions since April 9 have been designed to exacerbate the humanitarian situation, but there are some that think it is just maneuvering ahead of a possible Egyptian-brokered ceasefire. End Comment.

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